



How to WORK with the Media

To Promote the Low-Risk Drinking Guidelines in
Your Community

Produced by
The Centre for Addiction
and Mental Health
Public Affairs

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How to Work with the Media

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Media Relations – The Basics

Good relations with the media is essential today. Positive exposure in the media is critical to building your organization's credibility, branding and increasing your profile across the communities you serve. Additionally, doing media interviews about mental health and addiction issues is an easy, effective way to create public awareness and education. In the end, increased positive media profile benefits everyone at your organization.

Good relations with media are built through increasing your ability to respond to incoming requests in a timely manner, developing personal relationships with selected journalists, sending out timely and relevant press releases – overall building your credibility with the media by providing good, effective and efficient interviews, whether proactive or reactive.

The media environment is ever changing. With the introduction of new media outlets including web-based media, 24-hour news shows and additional daily newspapers, there is an increased demand for media interviews with very tight deadlines. This also means that there is an increased pressure for the media to get the 'scoop' and be the first media outlet out with a story. Although you may think that all these changes don't affect you or your potential involvement with the media – they do. These changes increase the demands on your organization to respond quickly to the increasing volume of media calls you receive. As you continue to build your relationships with the media and your capacity to respond to them, you can be sure to increase your organization's positive exposure to the media.

The Role of Public Affairs/Communications Staff in Media Relations

Many organizations, particularly large ones, have Public Affairs or Communications staff who play a key role in developing good relations with the media. If your sponsoring organization has communications staff, you should check with them to see what the organization's policies are for dealing with the media.

How to Use the Media

Media Relations can be a very important part of your organization's work. Using the media allows you to provide accurate information to the public, gives you a voice in influencing public policy and increases your profile and credibility with the general public. Because of the scope of the work of your organization, you may use the media in different ways.

Reactively

The media may call you to seek an expert opinion on one of the many topics and issues that you deal with or to seek your organization's opinion on a topical issue. You may use this as an opportunity to increase the profile of your organization and its expertise, to create better public awareness and understanding of mental health and addiction issues and to build your relationships and rapport with the media.

It is important to remember that if you don't respond to the request, the media will find someone else who may not have as much expertise as you do, and therefore the public may not be provided with the best information. The better you are at responding to calls, the more likely you are to get more calls and increase your opportunity to promote your messages.

Receiving a Media Call

When you receive a media call, it is important to get the following details:

- what the angle is,
- who else the media outlet may be talking to,
- the specifics of the request, i.e. the nature of the questions that may be asked,
- where the interview will take place (you may want to check and see if there are any security protocols at your organization if cameras will be coming on-site),
- what the media's deadline is, and
- any other information that will help you respond to the request.

Essentially, get as much information as possible before deciding if you or someone else from your organization should respond to the request. If you don't think your organization can respond, it is always a good idea to let the reporter know as soon as possible and make some suggestions about what organizations the media should call to request an interview.

You should never respond to the reporter right away, because you should always take time (even if it is only a few minutes) to get prepared. Record the information listed above and tell the reporter you will have to get back to them. Then do – before their deadline.

Proactively

In an effort to increase your positive media profile, create awareness of your organization and increase public understanding of the issues you deal with, you may also want to engage in proactive media relations. There are a number of ways to do that, including:

- issuing a release (i.e. reminding people about responsible drinking at key times of the year)

- arranging a media conference (i.e. to announce the results of a major study)
- pitching a story on a specific topic to a small list of reporters, or to one reporter (i.e. the way a local person turned his life around after discovering what heavy drinking did to his life)

If you have an idea about a possible media story, there are a number of things that you will need to consider. Many external factors play into the best strategy for media relations. Please see the attached communications template that will help you think through some of these factors (i.e. audiences, objectives, timing). The communications template will help you to determine the best communications strategies for your organization, which may or may not include media relations.

Role of the Spokesperson

It is important to be aware of your organization's perspective on key issues, who the designated spokespeople are and the policies regarding staff speaking to the media. For the most part, people contacted by the media are speaking on behalf of their organization. If your opinion differs from that of the official perspective of your organization, you may want to discuss this with your director. In situations like this it is frequently critical that the individual clearly state in any media interview, "This is my personal opinion and does not necessarily represent the view of xxxx organization..."

Why is Media Training Important?

Many people get involved in media interviews without any media training and learn as they go. It is always helpful to have some media tips in your back pocket so you are always prepared. Even if you have had media training or have done many interviews, it is always helpful to take a course to remind yourself of some of the tricks of the trade. As well, in this ever-changing media environment it is good to be sensitive to possible issues and changing media tactics.

The media spend years finessing their interviewing tactics so that they can get the best story. They even take courses to learn special interview tactics to use with someone who has been 'media trained.' For all these reasons, it is important to always be alert when dealing with the media.

Different Types of Media Interviews

Incoming media calls are frequently from news reporters who are working on the news of the day. That means they usually have a tight deadline and need to do the interview the same day. Community newspapers will want to know what relevance a province-wide story has in their community. However, you may also receive calls from feature writers, documentary shows, magazines and other media who have longer deadlines. Usually these requests allow for longer interviews, and usually more of the interview is used because there is more space and time than in news reporting.

Print interviews, in most cases can be done over the phone. When an interview is done over the phone, you can be very well prepared and have your notes in front of you. Print interviews are the easiest media requests to accommodate because they are the least time-consuming and can be more flexible because their timelines can be a bit longer. For daily newspapers they usually need a response in the same day, but not within an hour. For community newspapers, they usually have a few days to do their stories because they print once or twice a week. However, print interviews and quotes have a significant impact as people can read the article more than once and print reporting tends to be more comprehensive than radio or television news coverage. Community newspapers are the main source of information in small communities, and therefore anything printed in a community newspaper has a big impact on the reader.

Radio interviews can be done over the phone but radio journalists prefer if the interview is done in person. Radio reporters usually have the shortest timelines because they are on the air all day long and they usually want to get the story for the next news broadcast. Many talk radio shows request live interviews regarding the news of the day – a commentary or expert opinion. Live radio (and television) interviews can be difficult for people who have little media experience, because there is only one chance to get your message across. On the other hand, live interviews are usually 2-5 minutes long and therefore they provide an opportunity to provide more information on the topic without the fear of being edited and therefore, possibly misrepresented.

When doing radio interviews over the phone, you can keep your notes in front of you. But it is important that you are cautious about shuffling the papers (because that sound will be heard on the radio). You should also be cautious about sounding like you are reading from your notes – reading makes for very boring radio, and you will lose your credibility with the radio audience.

Television interviews always have to be done in person. It is a visual medium, and therefore they need an image to go along with their story. Television interviews can be difficult because you can't have your notes in front of you, so you have to be well prepared. On occasion you may get a request for live television interview requests, which usually come from 24-hour news shows, or television talk shows. Getting involved in television interviews is usually the most time-consuming, however, television can also be the most powerful news medium and has a significant impact on the viewing audience.

It is important to note when you are doing television interviews that, because television is a visual medium, what you are doing, what you are wearing and how you are standing can distract the viewer, and in some cases can take away the credibility of what you are saying. There are some simple tips for doing television interviews. In order to ensure you don't distract the viewer:

- Don't wear bright clothing, or clothing with big, obvious patterns. On camera, dark-coloured clothing generally looks better than light-coloured clothing. Make sure your tie is straight; your hair is tidy.

- If you are sitting during the interview, sit straight up. Don't sit in a chair that rocks and don't lean back in your chair as it may give the impression that you are bored.
- Don't keep your hands in your pockets.
- Stand still – the more you move around, the more you will distract the viewer.
- Look at the interviewer and not the camera.

Internet/Website Interviews: With the growing number of news-based websites, you should be prepared to respond to interviews for the internet/websites. The same principles apply to this type of interview – stick to your key messages and be prepared. Depending on the website and its capabilities, the interview request may require a phone interview or an on-camera or in-person interview.

In all cases when an interview is for a news item, the interview will be edited. That means that everything you say will not be included in the news piece. And you do not have control over what the media uses and doesn't use. However, if you learn how to use 'soundbites' during an interview, you are more likely to be quoted correctly.

What is a 'soundbite'?

A soundbite is a short succinct statement that can be used as a quote on television or radio – a 'quotable quote'. Usually television or radio news pieces are between 15-30 seconds, and if you have been interviewed for the news piece, they will edit your interview and play a 3-6 second piece of your interview. Your messages should be short and succinct so that when the news piece is being edited, they will use your quote. If you are not succinct, the editor may 'cut and paste' your statements together to get a 'soundbite' and, in turn, they may misconstrue what you have said.

Tips for Dealing with the Media

The most important things to remember when dealing with the media:

- never go 'off the record' with a reporter or media person under any circumstances,
- prepare for the negative and positive questions, and
- always have your key messages ready before going into an interview situation.

One thing that many people forget when doing media interviews is that it is okay to say, "I don't know the answer to that question." If you are doing a print interview or a radio or television interview that isn't live, refer the reporter back to your communications department (if available) or try to recommend another spokesperson (either from your organization or another organization) to handle the reporter's additional questions. If you are doing a live radio or television interview, the reporter will have to move on to avoid dead air time.

Interview Techniques

Reporters have been trained to get the information they need to report the story they are working on. In order to do that, they use many different techniques. Here are just a few examples of interview techniques that journalists use:

Asking the same question in many different ways:

Reporters sometimes do this to see if you are inconsistent in your answers – a great example of why you should be prepared. Television reporters often ask the same question a number of times in hopes of getting a better, more simplified quote ('soundbite').

Leading questions:

Reporters will sometimes suggest the answer they are looking for in their question to you. Never repeat a negative comment by a report – for example "Isn't this new policy just focussed on the needs of people who live in big urban areas? It will never have an impact for people in small communities, like the one we live in." You should not respond by saying "No, this policy doesn't just affect people in urban areas..." You should respond with "This policy will have a positive impact for people in local communities such as ours because..."

Rapid-fire questioning:

Reporters ask questions very quickly and aggressively, which can be very difficult to deal with as an interviewee. Don't let the reporter's pace set the tone for the interview. Take your time and answer each question slowly. When a reporter asks numerous questions at one time, pick the question you want to answer and only answer that question using your key messages.

Silent approach:

When you have finished responding to a reporter's question, the reporter will sometimes not respond immediately – leaving some dead air space. Don't feel compelled to keep talking or add to what you were saying. Only say what you want to say and let the reporter fill the gap.

Friendly approach:

Reporters will sometimes try to make you feel comfortable and develop a personal rapport with you, so that they are more likely to get more information from you. It is important to know your boundaries and ensure that you don't say more than you want to about any subject.

'In your personal opinion...':

Often to get people to deviate from their 'message track', a reporter will ask 'In your personal opinion...' You should avoid giving your own personal opinion when doing media interviews, and stick to the facts. In this situation, if you gave your own opinion, it is likely that the reporter would use that quote and misrepresent your own views as the views of your organization.

Off-the-record:

Another tactic that is used to get an interviewee away from using their key messages, a reporter will say, “Off-the-record, what do you really think about...” You should never go off-the-record under any circumstances, because nothing is off-the-record. The reporter can use any information you give them and therefore you should never stray from your key messages or say anything that you would not want to be quoted on.

How to Turn an Interview Around

When an interview is not going in the direction that you would like it to go, bring it back to subject matter that you are comfortable with, using a technique called bridging. Use the opportunity to return to your key messages by saying:

“Let’s look at this from a broader perspective...”

“That is not the real issue. The real issue is...”

“Let’s set that argument aside...”

“Another way to look at this issue is...”

DOs	DON'TS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Be prepared with key messages before doing an interview. ✓ Make your own notes before going into an interview situation. ✓ Use simple language. We often forget that the general public isn't familiar with our jargon, and in order for people to get something out of your news clip; you need to use simple language. ✓ Repeat your key messages as often as possible. ✓ Relax. Take your time and speak slowly. ✓ Be alert throughout the entire interview. ✓ Bridge back to your key messages if the reporter is going astray. ✓ Try to predict all the interviewer's questions before going into an interview situation. Prepare key messages in preparation for those questions to ensure you are completely prepared for the interview. ✓ Be brief and keep to your key messages. Even if there is a moment of silence, don't fill the gap with additional information. ✓ If you don't know the answer, say so. You are allowed to say, "I'm sorry I am not able to answer that question." Always refer the reporter back to another expert or spokesperson to answer their additional questions. ✓ Stick to the facts. Respond carefully and be sure you can back up whatever information you present. ✓ Ask the reporter to clarify the question if you are unsure about what the reporter is asking. ✓ If possible, send written materials that support your interview (i.e. facts and statistics) to the reporter following your interview. If your organization has a Communications Department they may be able to help you find this information. ✓ Ask the reporter when the article or news piece will be printed, appear on television or be aired on the radio. ✓ Do a practice interview or verbally go over your key messages with one of your colleagues before doing an interview. It is helpful to practice out loud, so that you know if you are comfortable with what you are going to say. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Don't talk to a reporter 'off the record'. Nothing with the media is 'off the record'. ✗ Don't try to tell the reporter everything – your key messages will get lost and the reporter will have too much information to digest, which reduces the chances of your key messages being used in a news clip/quote. ✗ Don't get led by the reporter's questions. Lead off with your key messages. ✗ Don't do an interview when you are not prepared. ✗ Don't answer questions that you are not in a position to answer. ✗ Don't give specific responses to questions about specific individuals or situations – answer these questions in a general way. For example, if you were involved in a live call-in show, and someone asked, "I think my daughter has schizophrenia (or is an alcoholic). She has been acting differently..." You should respond by saying, "I can't make a clinical judgement over the phone; you need to bring your daughter to your GP. What I can tell you is: symptoms for schizophrenia (or alcoholism) can include..." ✗ Never say 'No comment.' Again, if you aren't in a position to respond to the question, just say so. ✗ Don't repeat the negative. ✗ Don't use jargon.

What can you do when an interview has gone badly?

If you feel your interview has gone badly, it is important to let your organization's communications staff, your Executive Director or your Board of Directors know as soon as possible. If you have made a mistake during your interview, it is important to correct the misinformation with the journalist.

In a situation where a reporter has completely misinterpreted or misquoted what you have said, a phone call to the reporter and/or a letter to the editor may be necessary. A judgement will need to be made about the severity of the error and whether it is worthy of a correction.

***And remember even if you think you did a bad interview,
It's usually never as bad as you think it was!***

Three things you can do to give yourself a sense of control when doing media interviews

1. Arrange the interview so you call the reporter instead of the reporter calling you, or you do the interview in person at your location, so that you can be prepared and not caught off- guard.
2. Predict the good and the bad questions and write your own notes so that you are ready to respond.
3. Remember you are the expert and you know more than the reporter does!

Proactive Media Relations

In an effort to increase your positive media profile and increase public understanding of the issues that you deal with, from time to time it's important to engage in proactive media relations. For community agencies and the initiatives that you are involved in, it is important to remember the local or community newspaper. This is a terrific way to get your story out there. Community newspapers don't tend to be looking for "hard" news stories, as daily newspapers do, and they welcome the local angle.

If you are considering approaching the media to bring attention to a project, here are some tips on how to approach the media.

Media Releases

While it is true that newsrooms are inundated with news releases, every newspaper, television and radio station is constantly on the lookout for good news stories. Community media outlets are especially open to good local stories. The easier it is for the reporter to get the information — in the form of a well-written news release, for example — the more likely he or she will pursue the story.

How to write a Media Release

A news release should be written when you have something to say to the media. Don't waste their time if you don't have a news angle that ties in with something timely, an upcoming event or something that's new. Keep in mind that a news release is for routine information; a news conference is for very extraordinary news and will provide the reporters with easy access to newsworthy people.

Media Release: the format

- 8-1/2 by 11 inch paper
- one side, double spaced, although single spaced is increasingly used
- on letterhead, with time of release, date and name of city or town

Media Release: the content

- Ensure you have a story to tell.
- Make the news relevant for readers. If you're sending the release to a local community media outlet, make the story interesting to **THAT** community.
- The first sentence should capture the reader's attention with a strong "lead" or "hook."

- Put the essential facts in the first paragraph, answering the who, what, when, where, why and how of the story.
- Use the inverted pyramid technique with the most important details at the top of the release and the least important at the bottom.
- Make your release appealing, evocative, exciting. Dull releases usually end up in wastebaskets.
- Write in clear, simple language. Keep sentences short and punchy. Paragraphs should be no longer than three or four sentences
- Cover the facts.
- Include quotes from local experts to add interest and provide context for the information being provided.
- Keep it accurate. Triple check all names, date and figures.
- Keep it short.
- Include a media contact person on the bottom of your release and make sure that person is easily reachable by telephone and/or pager. Remember, the media frequently works under tight timelines.

Additional Helpful Information

- Whenever possible, provide the media with the name of an individual who is willing to tell their personal story. Be sure to have the client sign any release forms allowing you to provide the media with the name of the client. Newspapers will often permit people to use pseudonyms so that they can remain anonymous while sharing their story to help others. **(N.B. Please remember that personal / identifying information about clients is confidential. Media personnel are not customarily allowed to observe or attend a group or session. You should consult your organization's media and/or confidentiality policies or speak to your director.)**
- Include a one-page fact sheet or backgrounder (we have provided you with samples) with the media release. A backgrounder is meant to provide the journalist with the additional information that isn't appropriate to include in the news release.

If you're not sure if your story would be considered newsworthy, remember the old journalism adage:

If a dog bites a man, that's not news. When a man bites a dog, that's news!

Media Release Template and Sample Releases

SAMPLE #1

Local agencies to unveil innovative, interactive display about responsible drinking

For Immediate Release: April 28, 2000 – NAME OF CITY (in caps) – Ready, set, drink! Holidays can be as stressful as being at the starting gate of a race. They are tempting times for people who enjoy drinking at non-stop social situations. Five agencies from **(City)** understand the temptations people will be facing and will be showcasing a new interactive display on responsible drinking. It will be free and open to the public at **(LOCATION)**, Monday through Saturday from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.

The display was developed in **(City)** by local merchant, John Doe. He decided it was time to change his ways after he was stopped for drunk driving two years ago. **(Quote important near the top of a release)** “ I needed to create this display for me and for hundreds of others who sometimes don’t know when to draw the line. Many people have told me they wished they had gone through this experience before they went out drinking,” said Doe.

(More info about the display, how it works, Doe’s trials in building it)

Doe will appear at the display on **(date and time)**. After **(date)**, the display will move on to London, Ontario.

(Details about participating agencies).

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(all news releases should have a - 30 - centred, at the end of the release. It informs the media that it is the end of the news release.

For further information, contact **(Name)** at (000) 000-0000.

SAMPLE #2



Centre
for Addiction and
Mental Health
Centre de
toxicomanie et
de santé mentale

Insert service provider logo

Don't Drink and Drive this Holiday Season

For immediate release: December ____ (insert day of month), 2000, _____ (insert name of the community), Ontario: This holiday season there is one business in _____ (insert name of the community) community that is not looking for increased business – the *Back on Track* program. *Back on Track* is Ontario's Remedial Measures Program for Impaired Drivers.

"As we approach the holiday season, it is critical that people recognize that impaired driving has serious consequences. We would definitely prefer that people be informed about the hazards of drinking and driving and prevent them from ever having to attend our programs," said _____ (insert person's name), the coordinator of the _____, (insert name of the organization) that offers the *Back on Track* program for the _____ (insert name of the community) community.

The *Highway Traffic Act* requires convicted impaired drivers to successfully complete *Back on Track*, Ontario's Remedial Measures Program, before their licences can be reinstated. Everyone who attends the program receives an assessment and must attend an education or treatment component. Convicted drivers should register for *Back on Track* as soon as possible after they receive their notice of suspension. This avoids a delay in getting their licenses back. It can sometimes take more than ten months to complete the program.

The remedial program for convicted impaired drivers is just one part of a community response to impaired driving along with legal consequences, fines, license suspensions, public awareness and prevention programs. Research indicates that remedial programs like *Back on Track*, especially when combined with licensing sanctions, reduce recidivism.

Impaired driving is the greatest single criminal cause of death and injury in Canada. Recent statistics (1997) from the Ministry of Transportation of Ontario show that 35 percent of all drivers killed on our roads had been drinking prior to their deaths. In the same year, alcohol was involved in the death of 26 percent of all persons killed on our roadways, which includes innocent pedestrians, passengers and other drivers. While the presence of other drugs is not routinely investigated, their use can also contribute to traffic crashes, injuries and death.

Back on Track is managed by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) for the Ministry of Health and operates in co-operation with the Ministry of Transportation of Ontario. *Back on Track* programs are offered by community service providers in a variety of locations across the province. To register for *Back on Track*, people can call toll-free 1-888-814-5831.

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For further information, please contact _____ (insert name of community contact) at _____ (insert telephone number with area code).

When to Use a Media Advisory

Media advisories are used to 'advise' media of upcoming events or press conferences that they may be interested in attending. When writing a media advisory, follow the same rules, as you would when you are writing a press release – except keep it even shorter. It is critical that the information on a media advisory is 'catchy' to get the attention of the person reading it, and make them consider attending. Make sure to send this out a few days in advance of the event.

SAMPLE MEDIA ADVISORY

Significant Increases in Drug and Alcohol Use Among Ontario Students Shown in Study to be Released by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

November 9th, 1999, TORONTO, ON – To launch Drug Awareness Week, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health will release the latest Ontario Student Drug Use Survey (OSDUS) results which shows significant increases in drug and alcohol use among Ontario's youth.

The Centre, in partnership with the Peterborough County-City Health Unit will also unveil a leading-edge product – an interactive, educational Internet based tool for youth about making healthy choices and reducing risky behaviour related to alcohol use.

WHEN: Monday, November 15th, 1999
10:30 a.m.

WHO: Dr. Edward Adlaf, lead scientist for OSDUS, CAMH
Sean McCarthy, Youth Advisory Team Representative

WHERE: The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health
33 Russell St. (College and Spadina), Toronto
The Meeting Centre (2nd Floor)

The results of the OSDUS are embargoed until 10:30 a.m. on Monday, November 15th, 1999.

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health was created in 1998 through the successful merger of the Addiction Research Foundation, the Clarke Institute of Psychiatry, the Donwood Institute and the Queen Street Mental Health Centre. The Centre is a teaching hospital fully affiliated with the University of Toronto.

As a part of the Ontario Drug Awareness Partnership (ODAP), the Centre joins the Alcohol and Drug Concerns Inc., the Alcohol Policy Network, association of Local Public Health Agencies, Association to Reduce Alcohol Promotion in Ontario, the Council on Drug Abuse, Parents Against Drugs, and Society of St. Vincent De Paul in recognizing Drug Awareness Week, November 14 –20.

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For more information, please contact Christa Haanstra at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health at (416) 595-6015 or by pager at (416) 664-4652.

Media Kits

Media kits should be made available if you are holding a media conference, or inviting media to attend an already existing conference.

A media kit should include the following:

- Media release – should always be the first thing that the journalist sees when they open the package
- Backgrounder with additional information on the projects
- If possible, a one-pager on the agencies involved in the initiatives
- If possible, a brochure on the project
- If possible, a fact sheet on the issue (i.e. if the media conference is on club drugs, then include a list of facts about club drugs)
- Any other related materials – i.e. any copies of journals/external newsletters your organization produces that focuses on a similar issue

Key Messages

Whenever you are engaging in media relations you should prepare key messages. Key messages are short, succinct points that you want people to know about your project. When developing key messages, keep in mind your audience (which is usually the general public). Don't use jargon, and review your key messages by considering "If I was speaking to someone who knew nothing about the project/initiative that I am speaking about, would this key message make sense to them?"

You should generally have three key messages that you want to get across to the journalist. Any more than that and you will likely forget your key points. Also, there is the risk that the journalist will get lost in all the messages and be less likely to get them right when doing the story.

Key messages should be used throughout your interview with the journalist. Don't wait for them to ask you the right question, use some of the techniques listed above to use your key messages. Don't be afraid to repeat the messages – the more you repeat them, the more likely they are to be used by the journalist.

Photo Opportunities

Newspapers and television stations are always interested in visuals for their stories. When holding a media conference, or inviting media to an event, it is a good idea to consider having a 'photo opportunity' to entice the media. If there will be an opportunity for photos (i.e. a ribbon cutting ceremony, youth actively involved in a new video game for youth, etc.) make note of that in your media release or media advisory, with details of the time and room, etc. Remember, be creative!

You can also use a photo opportunity to promote an upcoming event in your area.

For example, if you have a food drive where you are asking people to donate food, you can invite the local media to a photo opportunity a week in advance to generate interest and support. For example, ask your local politician to participate, and build a stack of food outside the local grocery store (with the permission of the grocery and its owner) as your photo opportunity. The photo should include the local politician, the grocery store owner and a representative from your organization standing beside the stack of food. To invite media to a photo opportunity, simply use a media advisory and send it out a few days in advance. Follow up calls to the reporters is also suggested.

Suggestions for Proactively Dealing with the Media

- When sending out a release to the media, ensure that you have selected a spokesperson or spokespeople. Make sure that the person is available by telephone and for a possible television or radio interview on short notice.
- Develop a list of other experts that your media contact person can put the journalist in contact with. The easier you make their job, the more likely you are to get coverage and the more likely the reporter will contact you in the future.
- Utilize opportunities such as Drug Awareness Week, Mental Health Week, Holiday RIDE programs, and other such seasonal opportunities to promote your program to the media (see Remedial Measures news release example).
- Send the media release out on the day that it is news and be prepared to respond to requests for media interviews on the same day.
- If you want media to attend an already existing event, send out a media release a few days in advance, indicated that media are invited to attend the event. Have a separate area for media people to sign in and pick up the media kits, and if necessary to wear a nametag that says media (so the other participants know who they are).
- If you are holding a media conference, send out a media advisory (see attached sample of a media advisory) a few days in advance, and then send out a media release the day of the press conference (distribute it to media in attendance, and send it via fax to everyone you sent the media advisory to).
- If you have time and resources, do follow-up calls with the journalists to whom you have sent your media release/advisory to make sure they received it, and to see if they are planning on attending your event or if they are interested in doing the story. Before calling, have your key messages and 'pitch' ready. It is likely that they haven't seen the release or advisory, so if you have them on the phone you want to take that opportunity to 'sell' your story.
- Call your local media outlet/reporter and suggest an idea for a story. Be prepared with materials that you can fax them about your idea.

Sample of a Backgrounder

Back on Track

Impaired driving is the greatest single criminal cause of death and injury in Canada. Recent statistics (1997) from the Ministry of Transportation of Ontario show that 35 percent of all drivers killed on our roads had been drinking prior to their deaths. In the same year, alcohol was involved in the death of 26 percent of all persons killed on our roadways, which includes innocent pedestrians, passengers and other drivers. While the presence of other drugs is not routinely investigated, their use can also contribute to traffic crashes, injuries and death.

Back on Track is Ontario's remedial measures program. Under the *Highway Traffic Act*, any person convicted of a drinking and driving offence in Ontario will automatically have his or her driver's licence suspended. For offences that take place on or after September 30, 1998, the Act requires convicted impaired drivers to successfully complete the *Back on Track* program before their licence can be reinstated.

Anyone who is convicted of a drinking and driving offence will receive a suspension notice. The notice includes instructions on how to register for *Back on Track*. Once someone has registered and paid the \$475 (plus GST) to cover the costs of the program, he/she will be referred to the appropriate program. Convicted drivers should register for *Back on Track* as soon as possible after they receive their suspension notice. This will help avoid delays in getting their licences back.

Participants must take part in a one-hour initial assessment. Based on the assessment, participants will be assigned to either an education or a treatment program. Six months after they complete their program, participants must call for a follow-up interview.

The education program is eight hours in length. It includes presentations, exercises, discussions and group work and helps participants learn about:

- how alcohol and other drugs affect driving performance and safety
- the legal and personal consequences of an impaired driving conviction
- ways to avoid drinking and driving.

The treatment program, about 16 hours in length, helps participants to:

- learn about, and take responsibility for, their alcohol and drug use and its consequences
- commit to reducing or stopping problem use of alcohol and drugs
- plan to avoid relapses and make healthier choices
- avoid drinking and driving.

Participants are responsible for arranging for their follow-up interview, which takes about 30 minutes, six months after finishing their education or treatment program. The follow-up interview:

- assesses and reinforces the benefits of the education or treatment program
- reviews the program content
- reinforces the goals and strategies for avoiding drinking and driving developed by participants during the program.

Research has shown that remedial programs are successful in reducing recidivism, (i.e. the participants are less likely to drink and drive again than if they had not completed the program) especially when the remedial programs are combined with licensing sanctions.

SAMPLE LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Re: Are You Drinking Too Much?

Article in the December 2000 issue of *O, The Oprah Magazine*

Just how much is too much?

It's a simple yet complex question. Ask ten addiction therapists that question and you may get ten different answers.

And it's because of that lack of academic cohesion that congratulations must be offered to Kathy Merrell for writing an article that highlighted both issues and the balancing of consequences that everyone must consider when deciding when and how much to drink.

But what of specifics? This article begs the question: Hasn't anyone developed guidelines regarding safe drinking limits for people of legal drinking age? The answer, to which, is yes.

The "Low-Risk Drinking Guidelines" developed by researchers at Canada's Centre for Addiction and Mental Health and the University of Toronto is based on a 0-2-9-14 Formula. Not having any drinks at all offers the best possibility of not developing an alcohol-related problem. While consuming no more than two standard drinks daily and a maximum of 9 for women and 14 for men weekly are the recommended limits. A standard drink contains 13.6 grams of alcohol. Or, as much as is found in 5 oz. of wine (12% alcohol), 1.5 oz. of spirits (40% alcohol), or in a 12 oz. bottle of regular strength beer (5% alcohol).

In addition to keeping these numbers in mind, the Centre suggests that if you don't already drink, you shouldn't start drinking for health reasons. To keep your heart healthy, eat better, exercise more and don't smoke. Avoid getting intoxicated or drunk if you do drink. Wait at least one hour between drinks. Have something to eat, and intersperse your alcohol consumption with non-alcoholic beverages such as water, soda or fruit juice. And it doesn't matter which type of alcohol you drink either – red or white wine, beer, or liquor – they all have the same effect on heart disease. But of course, these are only guidelines. For some people, drinking less than the guidelines or not at all may be recommended. Always make sure to consult with your physician.

It's not our place at the Centre to tell anyone how much or if they should or should not drink. That choice is up to the individual. All we ask is that one's decisions be *informed* decisions. After all, you maximize life by minimizing risk.

Sincerely,

APPENDIX

Communications Template:

This template is designed to assist in the development of effective communications with external audiences. It should be completed as a first step in developing a communications plan.

Project/Issue: _____

Background: Provide information that will put this project/issue into context including historical events, major issues, and current status.

Objectives: What are you trying to achieve with this communication?

Audiences: Whom are you trying to reach?

Key messages: What are the major points you wish to communicate?

Strategies: How do you propose to reach your audiences?

Timing: When do you wish to reach your audience? Do you need to phase in your communication in accordance with the sequence of your project/issue? Are there any upcoming events that you can connect your project with to make your project more timely?

Issues: Identify any sensitive issues of which you are aware, pertaining to this matter. If there are any issues, it is important to be prepared with key messages to address these issues.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Websites

Media Tips

www.cpa.medical.org/MIAW/Publicize.asp

Canadian Psychiatric Association provides tips on how to publicize your event. The information focuses on Mental Health Week but can be easily adapted for alcohol and other drug awareness campaigns.

www.nami.org/confer/miaw2k/mediatip.html

The NAMI website has some excellent tips and tools on working with the media including samples of media releases, advisories and fact sheets. Again, the material relates to mental health issues but the content is easily adaptable for alcohol and other drug related campaigns.

www.apolnet.org/index.html

The Alcohol Policy Network's online service is devoted to Canadian alcohol policy issues. The site has a page of contacts listed under resources for some of the major media although there are some older links that require updating.

www.cpa.ca/media.html

This is an excellent site developed by the Canadian Psychological Association. Although it is intended as a guide for psychologists, most of the advice is relevant for anyone working with the media. Much of the focus is on doing interviews. There is also a hard copy available for sale from the Association.

General Information

www.camh.net

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health's website has general information about alcohol and other drug related issues. A chronological list of the Centre's media releases is also included there.

www.frcentre.net/resources.htm

The Focus Resource Centre's Website has an excellent resource section with links to many other medical and health related sites.